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Indian Summer

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Summer in Canada comes quickly.
It comes when winter is newly gone,
and it comes pushing, hot and strong.

It comes with light and life and laughter.
It comes with blazing suns and hazy afternoons
and long soft evenings.



Indian people in Canada have known
the happiness of a Canadian summer
for many hundreds of years.
For them it has a special meaning,
a special way of being enjoyed.
To them it is a special time.

'Indian Summer' is the story of that time.







Indian dancing and song are for Indian people the very heart and soul of life. Dancing draws man closer to all living things and through them to the unseen forces of the universe itself.

It marks both the great and the little things of life. The dancing is done when a group of people get together, either to celebrate something, or to pray for someone who is sick or has just died, or even for the sake of just getting together. Indian people celebrate when some member of the family gets married or when neighbours drop in. Sometimes stories are told and there is some singing, and very often this leads to dancing. When a member of the family dies there is mourning, and people get together to say prayers and dance to the dead, but there must not be sadness, for the person who has just died has fulfilled the duty of living. So there is also a celebration, a feast in his honour.

Indian dancing is a way of expressing feeling, whether this is sadness or happiness or a feeling of friendliness. It is a way of asking for rain, for good hunting, for good fishing, for success in war. It is also a way of thanking the Great Spirit for what he has given to his children — food for the hungry, fur to keep warm, rain for the thirsty, sun for the crop, and wisdom for the foolish. Thanking him for giving the beautiful animals to look after man and his family, for the fruit on the trees, for the flowers which cover the earth.

Indian dancing is more than just keeping old ways alive, because it brings out the meaning of what it is to be an Indian. It brings the Indian people closer to one another and helps them recognize the links between the bands and groups, and makes them more aware of the good things of the past which they will be able to pass on to their children and grandchildren. It is part of making Indian people feel proud of what they are and what they represent, and feel hopeful for the future.



Proud eagle, beautiful eagle,
You have helped me with my dancing.
You have made me see beauty when I look at
Trees and birds and lakes.

I thank you, oh proud eagle,
For what you have given to me and to my people.

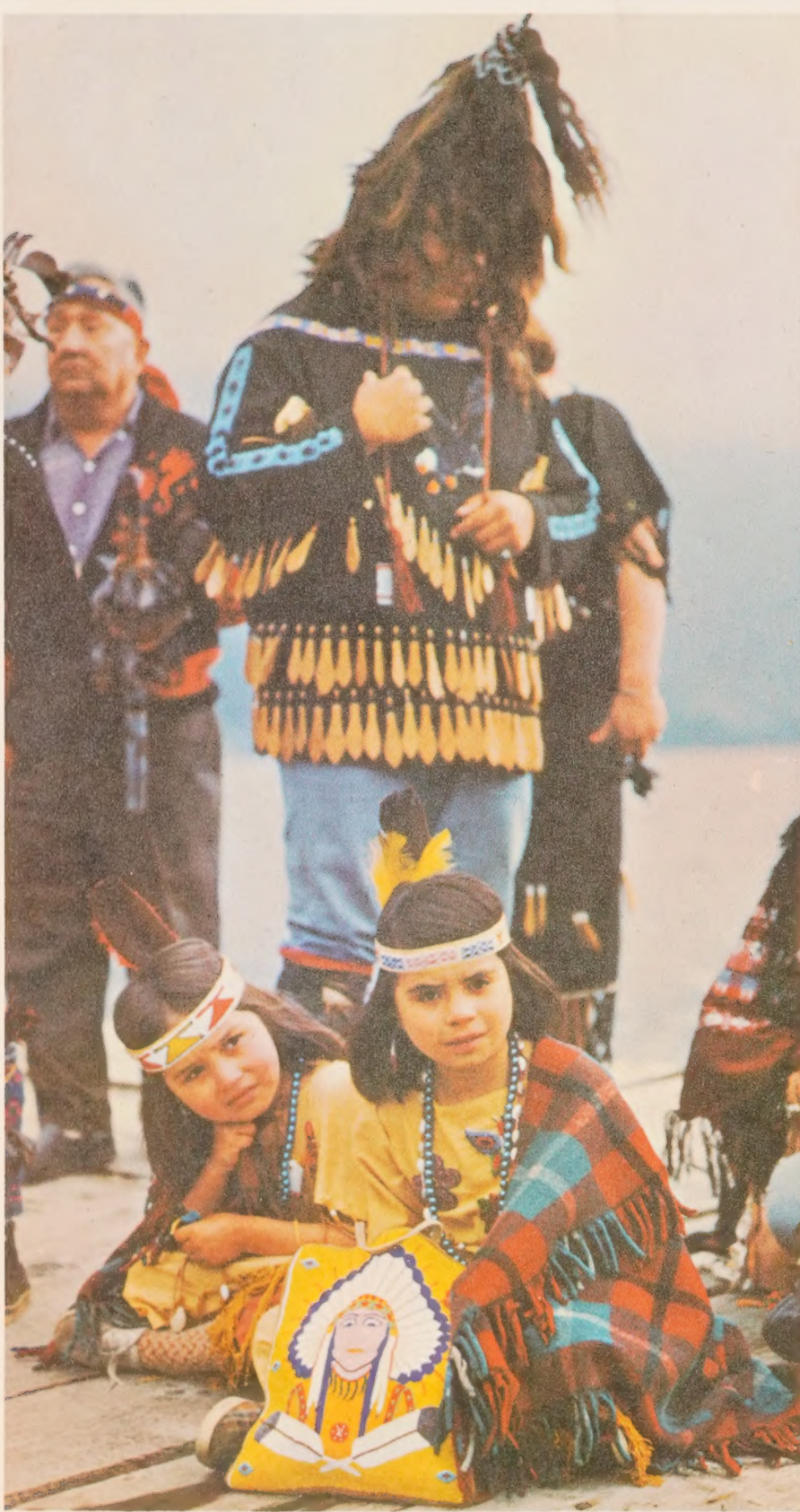
I will become like you, to honour you.

The hoop dancer dances to say what he is in a perfect way.

The drums beat in rhythm, his body moves swift as the light.
He whirls and he spins, the circles turn quickly around him.
To test the skill of his eyes and his hands, he dances.

Man seeks to be perfect in all that he does.
The test of the dance is the skill of the dancer,
And this is the proof of perfection.





Indian costumes are worn to identify the different tribes of Indians and to tell what area they come from, and also to make the dancing more colourful and beautiful. A beautiful costume shows how important the dance is.

When a man decides to do a dance, he needs a special costume, and he must prepare this costume himself. He chooses a design which is traditional to his tribe, which tells a story of the tribe or sometimes an important legend. He then prepares himself to go and hunt for the eagle feathers, and to get the finest fur for his costume. By doing this he proves that he takes pride in his tribe and in his belief.

After the material has been gathered, the dancer and some women of his tribe share many hours of hard work cutting and stitching and sewing a beautiful costume.

The patience and the skill that have gone into making the costume proves to the other members of the tribe that the dancer has made a special effort for his dance, and gives his dance a deeper meaning.



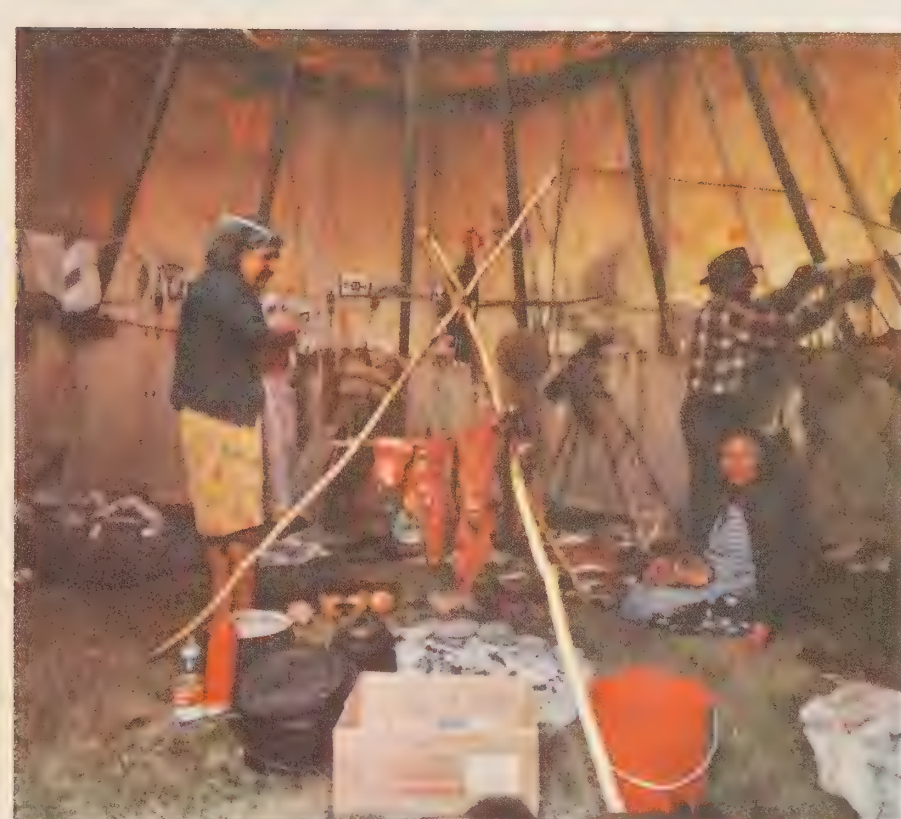
The Sun Dance is a time
For getting together
To hold a dance
To the great Sun Spirit
To thank him for what
He has given his children.



The circular Sun Dance lodge and the circle of teepees which surround it are arranged to resemble the shape of the sun. At the top of the lodge's large centre pole a nest is made from a clump of leafy branches to provide a home in honour of the Thunderbird who is often a mediator between the Sun and his children. The smell of the burning sweetgrass rises and is pleasing to the Sun.







The Sun Dance is one of the most sacred Indian dances.
The decision to hold it is made by the elders of the tribe
Only after a period of deep thought and meditation.

It is a great honour to get
An invitation from the Maker of the Sun Dance
To join with others in the ceremony
In honour of the Sun.

Outside the sacred area of the lodge, this is a time when families get
together. A time to help each other put up the tents and prepare the food
and look after the kids. A time to laugh and talk and play in the sun and
the grass. A time to share the summer with each other for a while.





A land and its people, bound together in a special way — this is an Indian community.

An Indian community never turns its back on a stranger, for its people welcome new friendships and new neighbours, sharing with them what they have. The feeling of being equal and of being accepted for what you are is the most important thing of all.

For those who live here, there is the special joy that comes from sharing the same tribal background. Summer is a special season because there is time to share this joy and this pride with each other, and to be thankful for what nature has given to this land and its people.

For all children summer is a special time. For Indian children it is even more so. Many of them live in houses that in winter are uncomfortable, but in the summer life goes on outdoors, and the home is a good place to come back to at night. Living outdoors, alone and apart from others, draws these children close to the land, and summer becomes a time of deep joy for them. In summer they discover the ways of nature while they play, and these ways will live in their minds for many years. They will remember what they know of nature after they grow up and learn about the fast city life, and remembering will be part of the deep pull for them to return to their birthplace.

Age doesn't mean too much in an Indian community. It doesn't divide the old and the young. Children are treated like adults, and a child can walk into any home and be loved and welcomed as a member of the family. People know where each child belongs and a child hardly ever gets lost. In their search for the hiding places they love, the children soon discover all the beautiful and mysterious places on the reserve. They play with what they see and find around them, and their imagination makes new games with what the trees, hills and lakes offer them.

An Indian childhood may not be rich in physical comforts, but it is rich in another way unknown to a city child. Here the strong bonds of the Indian community have their roots. Here the Indian child learns what it is to be an Indian in the golden summer sun.

















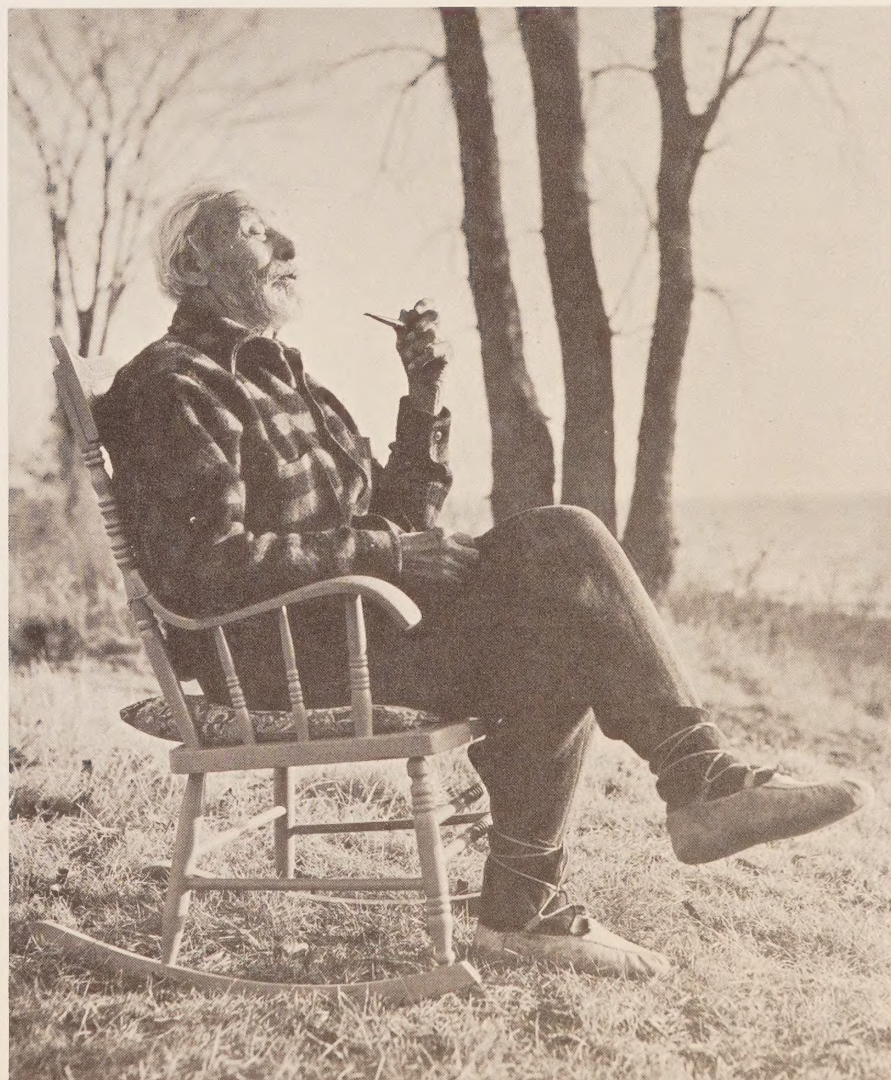
We have seen many summers come and go. It has been a good time, a time to sit in the sun and think for a while, listening to the wind blowing through the grass and watching the water rippling against the rocks. We have reaped a good harvest. This land is good to its people in the summer.





Summer of life, a special time.
A time to be proud of yourself and your land.
A time to understand these things, and to be joyful in the understanding.
Summer of life and light and love.







Indian Summer

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